

ONLINE SPRING EDITION NEWSLETTER 2023



TAKU RIVER TLINGIT
First Nation



LANDS

Heritage/Archaeology





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Building on the work that was initiated in 2021, this past summer (2022), we continued to explore the relationship between TRT oral histories and alpine archaeological sites. The oral histories contained in Jackie William's books and community knowledge bases like the TRT. geolive website have mapped dozens of Taku River Tlingit village sites and gathering places throughout the Taku basin.

The words of Elders and knowledge keepers like Mary Anderson, Antonia Jack, Elizabeth Nyman and dozens of others were recorded to create the interactive Geolive map. Keith Carlick and Terry Jack were responsible for creating many of the early traditional land use maps in the early 80's.

While many of the cultural sites that have been mapped over the years exist both in the memories of knowledge keepers

and in electronic form, sadly many these important places are not protected under colonial Canadian law. Using the tools of archaeology to record significant places in the traditional territory is one way of protecting these places from unwanted development, as all cultural sites that are older than 1846 receive protection in BC.

By recording the tangible aspects of cultural sites through archaeology, while interpreting the results through the lens of oral histories and knowledge, we receive a much fuller understanding of the past than either system could produce individually. Ultimately, these combined knowledge systems can be used to protect Tlingit lands from encroachment, while at the same time enriching collective knowledge about ancestral landscapes.



Koosawu Áa (Narrow Lake)

Terry Jack and Blake Evans working on an evaluative unit in the floor of the house depression

At the extreme north end of Koosawu Áa (narrow lake) or Surprise Lake near the confluence of Cup Creek and Pine Creek is a house depression. Also known as a 'winter house' This site is located north of Four Crown Mountain.

The image on the left is obsidian debitage (flakes) that are a by product of stone tool manufacture. Obsidian is volcanic glass that forms when lava cools rapidly.

Its homogenous texture and fracture pattern make it relatively easy to knap into a wide variety of tools and objects. There are no local obsidian quarries.

Using a tool called x-ray florescence, and comparing the obsidian found in the house depression at Koosawu Aa to all the other obsidian sources in North America I was able to determine that the obsidian in the house depression originated on the slopes of Mt. Edziza, which is almost 300km away.



KOOSAWU ÁA HOUSE DEPRESSION



In Sylvia Allbright's 1984 report 'Tahltan Ethnoarchaeology', she identified Tlingit villages from Telegraph creek to the ocean. The trail to Mt. Edziza begins at Telegraph Creek.

Jackie William's histories also point to a Taku River Tlingit occupation of the Stikine river drainage: "A long time ago, a glacier extended across the mouth of the Taku River, and people did not know the Taku River was there. That is why the Taku River Tlingit originally came up from the coast through the Stikine River, establishing a village at (Porcupine River).

The river was called the Porcupine because spruce trees sticking out of the glacier looked like porcupine quills. I believe this is the river they now call the Chutine. From here the Tlingit expanded their trapping and began settling the Upper Taku drainage, moving downstream along the Sheslay River" (Williams 2006).

The confluence of the Chutine and the Stikine is approximately 60 kilometers from the summit of Mt. Edziza.

HIDE OBJECT WITH STITCHING DATED TO 3,000 YEARS BEFORE PRESENT



Just south of Nelson lake, we found a tanned hide object melting out of the glacier high up on Mt. Switzer. While we were surveying the glacier, Terry shared with me that his relatives used to take him sheep hunting on the same mountain when he was a boy.

The object has regular holes cut into it, suggesting it was sewn to another material. Anyone have any ideas what type of clothing it might have been part of? So cool to think about Tlingit people hunting on the same mountain for over 3,000 years!!



ÍNHÉENI SHÁAK (MCKEE CREEK)

Sentinel Mountain in English is an alpine cirque that is roughly 10km south of the Atlin townsite. According to the Geolive website, Ínhéeni is the creek whose headwaters begin on the flanks of Ínhéeni Sháak , which translates to “flint creek”.

The English name for Ínhéeni is McKee Creek, and it is a popular hiking trailhead. As flint or chert is a commonly used toolstone in this region, it was reasonable to assume that quarrying activities took place in this cirque. It is also situated in close proximity to the caribou fence at Warm Bay and it is excellent caribou habitat.

Several oral histories talk about Inheeni as an important caribou harvesting area. It contains some of the few remaining persistent ice patches on the East side of Atlin lake. Last summer Barb Dawson and I surveyed the ridge, and we discovered a huge stone tool quarry with hundreds of culturally modified stone flakes!

ÍNHÉENI CHERT FLAKES



Flake tool (left) and chert flakes in various stages of reduction.

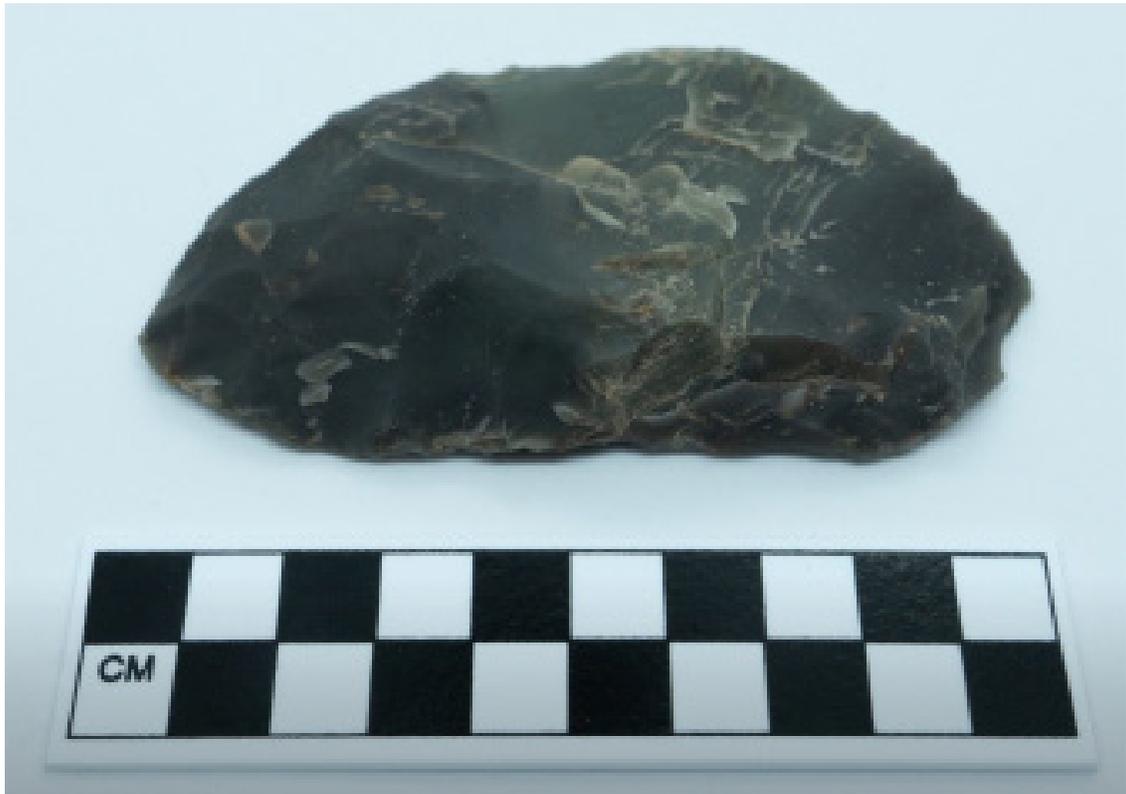
Most of the stone flakes that we found were from the early stages of reduction. There are hundreds of stone flakes that have been culturally modified spread across this entire mountain range.

There are numerous high quality chert outcrops that have visible indications that quarrying activities were sustained over a long period of time in this area.



Typically stone that is high in silica makes good tools, as silica is what glass is comprised of.

Many of the cultural materials we found up at Inheeni were preforms. These stone objects are essentially 'blanks' that were prepared in the alpine where high quality stone was visible and accessible.



Beautiful chert knife found by Trevor Williams, likely from the Inheeni quarry

SHÉIX'W HINI (HORSEFEED CREEK) OCHRE QUARRY

“There are two sites where Tlingits used to collect paint. One site is shéix'w hini (red/orange creek) called Horsefeed Creek in English. There is another site located on a creek upstream as well.

These sites were used by the Tlingits to obtain paint for pictographs such as the one of the canoe on the Taku River.”

-Jackie Williams





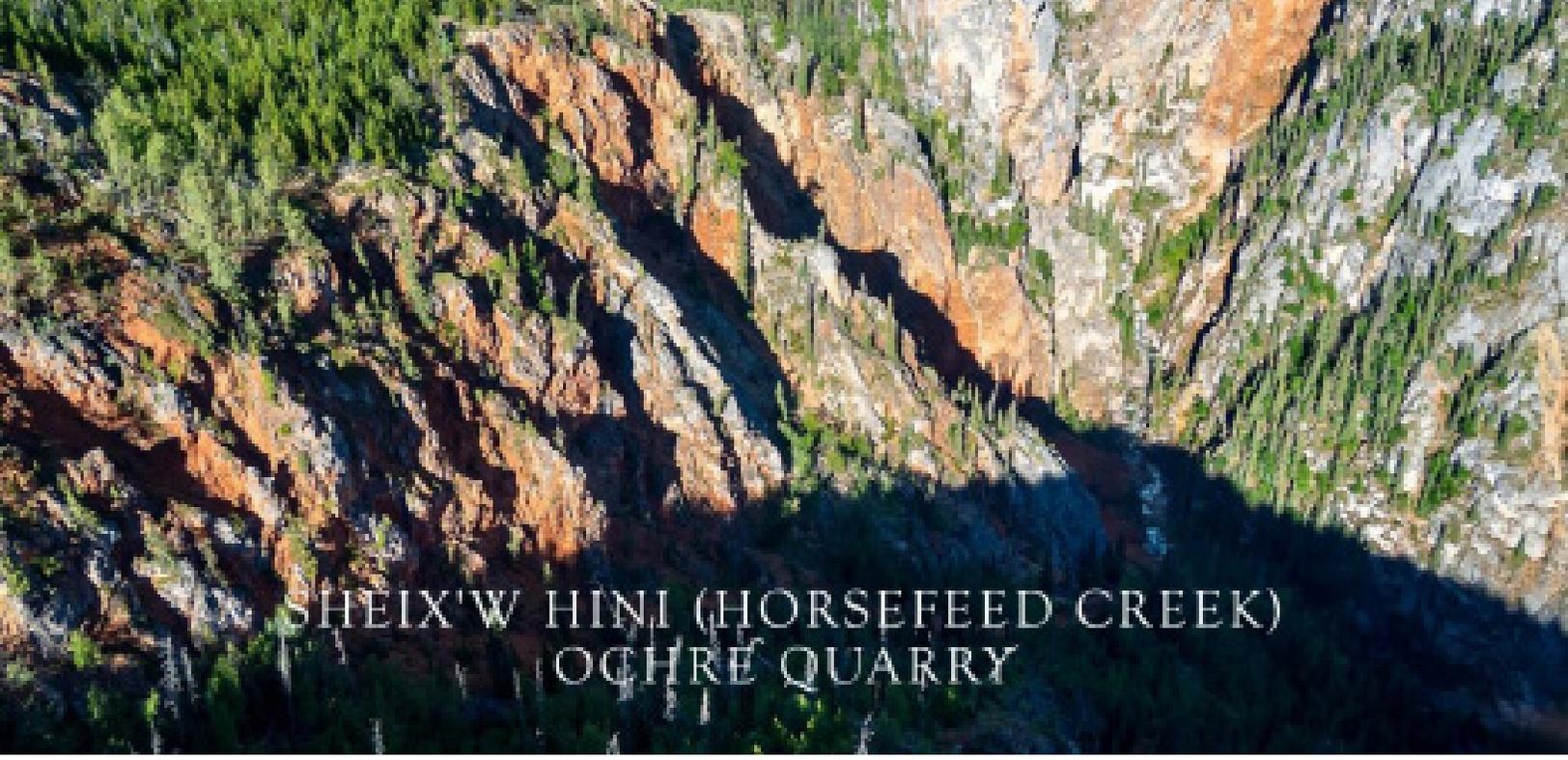
Wayne, Deb, Luke and I travelled to the quarry described by Jackie Williams, which are near the Fisheries weir on the Nakina.

After mapping the site, we collected some ochre from the canyon, and some samples for analysis.

Similar to obsidian, ochre can also be 'sourced' using x-ray fluorescence.

Both Wayne and Joanne Williams are planning to use some of this ochre in their art!

Since food flights into the Nakina weir are fairly regular in the summer, it will be possible to quarry more ochre when necessary now that we have a better idea of the access.



SHEIX'W HINI (HORSEFEED CREEK) OGHRE QUARRY

"People would paint their faces for ceremonies or warfare. During ceremonies, if people didn't have a mask they would use paint.

This paint was considered to have protective power because it came from Mother Earth. It was the slaves that collected the paint.

The slaves would use babiche as rope to lower themselves into the canyon to scrape the stain off the rock.

Sometimes during heavy rain the Nakina River flows a reddish color possibly due to the red stains at Shéix'w Hini washing into the creek."- Taku River Tlingit elder Jackie Williams



OCHRE, MUCH LIKE OBSIDIAN,
CONTAINS A UNIQUE GEOCHEMICAL
SIGNATURE THAT CAN BE TRACED TO
A SPECIFIC SOURCE.

As ochre was used for so many different applications, from creating pictographs to dyeing Chilkat robes and other regalia.

It will now be theoretically possible to determine which items were made with dye from the Taku basin because of the unique chemical signature.

This could be useful information, as the process of repatriating TRT regalia and art continues.

Questions? Interested in this work?

Get in touch!

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